[Memorandum to Dr. Botkin]

Mary Tomasi Men Against Granite

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DATE: JUL 29 1940 EL CLUB ESPANOL

The Spanish Club rooms breathe Old Spain, and from the far wall a poster proclaims - [Morira?] El Fasoisme! - Fascism Will Die! Beneath the words a crude, hand-knitted figure extends right arm up, the other down. Beside it a padlocked contribution box makes the plea, Salvomos El Nino Espanol. Bright Loyalist posters cover the east wall: Ayuda Al Pueblo Espanol! Ayuda a Espana! Cruz Roja Espanol. A long, hadwritten list of Barre subscribers hangs from the Spanish Red Cross Certificate.

El Club overlooks North Main Street, just above Barre's 'deadline.' The furnishings are simple, practical. Benches line the walls. Sturdy card tables are scattered the length and breadth of the main room. Limp, red-and-yellow streamers brighten the ceiling, their crispness lost to the June heat.

John Bavine, born Juan Bavine [some?] sixty-five years ago in Santander, Spain, is the secretary. Manuel Teral, his young Barre-born companion, has been secretary of the Barre branch of the Stonecutters' union for six years.

Joe Luiz, a second companion, sits at a table nearby. His English is better than Bavine's yet he makes no move to help his friend when he falters and gropes for a word. It is Manuel who picks up the sentence, twists it into a bolder expression of his own.

“This Club was start' back in 1926,” Bavine said. “There were few Spanish here before 1900. It is funny, they start to come over faster after the Spanish-American War. It is funny, too, that ninety percent in Barre, 2 an' in all of Vermont, come from one province in Spain called Santander. It is a place with as many people as Vermont. There is granite in that province, hard an' soft, but not all who came to Barre learned the trade over there. Maybe a half of them. Myself, I was a farmer, an' my father, too. I learn the stonecutting here. I still work in the sheds. For fifteen years I work in the [Tornazzi?] sheds in Montpelier. Now I work in Barre. In Santander the sheds are built in the open, like in Italy. The pay is pretty good, better than other skilled work like carpentering or plumbing. Over there it was cheaper to live, the money went further. The stonecutters did not try to fill their homes with the fine, expensive furniture they got over here. They were satisfied with plain, strong chairs, and not-too- comfortable beds. In Santander they do not use much machinery, everything is handwork, so with the fresh air an' all there is little danger for the lungs.

“Most of the Spanish in Barre are in the granite business. Louis Aja, who now lives in Montpelier, was the first Spanish baby born in Barre. That was only forty-three years ago. At South End there are ten Spanish-owned sheds. At the North End, almost as many. Spanish non-union men? No, I do not know of any here.”

Young Manuel's eyes flashed angrily. “Spanish non-union men! I should say not! It is the French! I know. A bunch of squawkers and suckers. They've come up to me and pulled their sob stories. 'Look,' they complain. 'My work is as good as So-and-So's. He gets his $8.50 a day, I get only $5.00. What can I do about it? Whiners! I should tell them to go to hell. I should say: you were satisfied to sneak up to some shed boss behind the Union's back and beg your miserable $5.00 or $6.00 a day. You've got no right to belly-ache now. I should tell them that. But the Union has rules. I have to 3 stick to them. O.K., I tell them, you've been working for $5.00 a day for a year, huh? O.K, then, pay up the Union dues for that period and you'll get your Union wages.”

Bavine spoke. “Some of these French, they are good Union-men. I know a few of the, fine fellows—"

Luiz, the silent one, nodded agreeably.

“Fine fellows!” Manuel mimicked. “Those French spoiled everything for us back in '22. We'd have a lot more today if it hadn't been for those strike-breaking rats. Farmers, bakers, anyone who had hands to work with. I bet some of 'em had never seen granite before!

“Maybe we should have stop' them,” Bavine suggested mildly. “You were pretty young then, Manuel.”

“Not too young, Bavine. Not too young. Don't forget I've been cutting stone sixteen years. You know what we should have done? We should have massed together, all of us, down at the Montpelier railroad station, and the Barre station. We should have met them at the train. Warned 'em to keep out. We'd have kept 'em out. It wouldn't have come to a good fight. They were too yellow for that. But the Union wasn't so strong then, it wasn't what it is today. Today it would be easy.”

“Eh, well Manuel, that is over, no?” Bavine said. “Let us speak of the Club... In the winter sometimes forty or fifty Spaniards gather here at night. That is when we have the good time. We talk about the sheds, an' politics, about everything, an' if a few get what you call 'too hot under the collar, 'they go in that little room over there. They shut the door. There they can yell all they want without disturb' the card players out here. We 4 play all kinds of games: briscola, trisette, tutti, [mus]. But it is our rule that never we should play for money. We play for wine or a beer. That we sell with no profit to the Club, they pay just what we pay for it. Twice a month we have ladies' nights. Then the hall is for the,; us men, we keep out.

“We Spanish are good Loyalists - so you see by the walls.” Bavine indicated the vivid posters. “Our Club has done good work for the victims of Facism. In France there are 500,000 refugees in concentration camps. That war in Spain — it did not take us in America long to lend a hand in it.” Bavine took a Club Ledger from the shelf. He run a stubby, calloused finger down a page filled with fine Spanish writing. “See, here is the record. It say we start' to take in contributions in August. That is fast work, no? Since then, up to date, we have taken in $15,000. Just here in Barre. There are many ways we raise money. Festivals, dances, picnics. Now we even have little stamps, like the [double-cross?] ones you see at Christmas. See, they say: Sociedades Hispanas Confederades. Ayuda a Espana.

“In the United States there are 176 clubs like this one that raise money for our suffering countrymen. It is what you call a big congraternity, these Clubs. The money we send to the Spanish Confederated Society in New York, and to the Medical Bureau - to save Spanish Democracy.”

Manuel interrupted, “That ship that arrived in Vera Cruz, Mexico, two weeks ago with 1,900 refugees aboard. It was money from our Spanish-American Clubs that got them here.”

“F 5 Bavine pursued his own thoughts. “I do not understand it,” he said [hold?] to himself. “The Spain I knew years ago was a quiet country, she love' peace. Her farmers work' the rich fields. Her artists were proud to make beautiful our big cities an' cathedrals. We were 22,000,000 people who want only to be left alone - an' now what. You see beautiful cathedrals all smash' an' buried; the cities in ruin. A friend of mine, he say the other day that one Spaniard he is killed every nine minutes. Every nine minutes. God, that is terrible! More than one million of them lay dead from this war.”

“Franco!” Manuel scoffed. “General Franco. Putty in Mussolini's hands, that's what he is. And what is that damn Mussolini? His own countrymen hate him and his Fascism. Most

every one of our older Barre Italians hate him. Only the young ones speak well of him. Why? Because they know no better. Because he is a grabber and a go-getter, they're proud to be of his blood. He's a conqueror, and it's gone to their heads.

“I have a wife an' three children in Spain,” Bavine said. “My wife she took the children there just before the war to see their grandmother. They stay' too long. After the war is start' they are not allow' to come home. It is my mistake, a foolish mistake. Always it has been in my heart to become the American citizen. Always I say, tomorrow I will take out the papers. But always there is something else to do, an' so I wait. But now - I have take them out - quick, like that. An' just as soon as I have them, I feel safer here. It makes me sick an' afraid to have them over there. My wife, she writes, an' I write to her; but what good is that? The letters, they have been open'. She cannot say what is in her heart, she cannot tell 6 the truth about what is go' on. An' my letters to her, they are open', too.”

Manuel stepped across the room and took from the wall a photograph of a group of young men. He pointed out two in the front row. “These are two of a our Barre Loyalists who went over to fight for a just cause. This older one was born in Spain but he'd lived here for a good ten years. He was wounded, he got away, he told us what was going on in Spain. He said that if they hear you belong to a bakers' Union or a tailors' Union, your life is not safe overnight. This younger fellow was born here in Barre. He was a good friend of mine. A brave fellow. He was killed. He'd never seen Spain, but he packs up right away, and goes over to fight. He didn't come back. We're going to have a good picture of him, of him alone. We'll put it there between those windows, [eh?], Bavine?”

Bavine smiled. “No, I don't care. Wherever you want.” He hunched himself in his chair. “Father [Leccacio?] Lobo does the good work for our cause. He is a very intelligent priest, an' good. He came to America to find help for the Spanish people. For twenty-five years he said [Hass?] every day in a cathedral in Madrid. He was well liked by the people.”

Manuel continued zealously, “He's been making tours all over the United States in behalf of the refugees. He came here to Barre April twenty-fourth, and spoke in Scampini Hall. The place was packed. Ex-mayor Gordon was one of the committee to get him here, he got in trouble for it. Father Lobo had spoken to the Spanish in Chicago a couple of days before, his next stop was Boston. He was good. He stood up there in his Roman collar. Sure, I'm a Catholic, he said, but this killing is not necessary. It is against the command of the Church. A short time after the priest left we had an Ambulance Drive. Made $656.00 in one night. Last week we had a Spanish Fiesta in the Armory hall. 7 There was a crowd that night. And not only Spanish people. How much did we make Bavine?”

“I cannot say for sure, all the expenses, they have not yet been figure'. But I guess there will be about $250.00 more for our poor Spanish.”